

# The Coalition

www.wacoalition.org

Advocates for Ethical Mental Health Care

Winter-Spring 2006

## Editor's Corner

Peter N. Moore, Psy.D.

This issue focuses on our *legislative hits and misses*. The Coalition has strong political influence thanks to our lobbyist, Laura Groshong. However, while Laura does an excellent job representing our interests in Olympia, the Board ultimately provides the direction. The lead article spells out what legislation the Board considered supporting, what the Board chose to endorse, and how the bills ultimately fared.

We also begin a new feature for *The Coalition: Meet Your Board Member*. We begin with Susan Cohen, our membership chair. Meet her on page 3.

Finally, we sadly say *goodbye* to Board Members **Chris Lange** and **Gail Rosenberg**. Chris worked extremely hard revamping our member database and website. Gail has assisted in any number of Coalition events and provided excellent input at our meetings. She also served ably as a proofreader for the Newsletter. We wish them both well.

## Coalition's Legislative Agenda: Mixed Success

Peter N. Moore, Psy.D.

The short legislative session ended not long ago. Our intrepid lobbyist, Laura Groshong commented, "There has been more activity for mental health funding than any time I can remember in the past 10 years."

In January, Laura had distilled a myriad of legislation down to eight key bills for the Board to consider. She asked the Board to select three or four for her to act upon. After careful deliberation, The Coalition Board gave her its legislative marching orders for the session.

These are the bills with Laura's descriptions (HB stands for House Bill, SB stands for Senate Bill) with sponsoring Legislator in parentheses that the Coalition asked her to pursue:

**HB 2499** (Schual-Berke) – granting the insurance commissioner the authority to review and *approve individual health benefit plan rates* (part of "Fair Share Plan" which requires all companies of 25 or more to offer health care to employees). It is quite complex and starts by changing the makeup of the High Risk Pool Board, which is needed to make other changes in the individual market, including adding a mental health benefit. This bill **died in House Rules Committee** and will be worked on during interim.

**HB 2501** (Schual-Berke) – this is a bill that would include *mental health services in health*

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### Who Ya Gonna Call !?!?!?!

Coalition Helpline: 206-444-4304

Who's My Legislator: 1-800-448-4881 (State and Federal)

Legislative Hotline: 1-100-562-6000

*benefit plans offered by associations.* WA law requires the word “association” be included in addition to “businesses of more than 50” to require the association plans are covered by the mental health parity law. There are 600,000 people covered by associations in Washington, about 1/3 of the total covered by our new mental health parity law. This bill **passed the House and Senate** and awaits the Governor’s signature at last report.

**HB 2803** (Green) – would *allow all licensed mental health professionals to provide mental health services to Medicaid enrollees.* This is part of a three year plan that would move to increase the rates paid by Medicaid to mental health providers (determined by the state). Currently only psychiatrists can provide mental health treatment to Medicaid enrollees, resulting in a major lack of treatment. This bill was **not included in supplemental budget.** Instead, it will be developed with DSHS during interim. Laura reported that, “We had hoped to be able to work out the details of a pilot project where all licensed mental health professionals could provide independent treatment to Medicaid enrollees also on GAU in time for the budget, but it proved too complicated. There is still support in MAA and the legislature for this pilot project and I think we will have a plan in place by next year for the legislature.”

The Board also asked Laura to *oppose HB 2431* (Campbell) – requiring *background checks on persons receiving a license as (mental) health care professionals.* It **died in Committee**, in part due to strong opposition from some of the groups I represent. The bill was seen as prejudicial and unnecessarily limiting for some types of felons who were no longer a danger to society. It **died in Committee**, in part due to strong opposition from some of the groups that Laura represents. The bill was seen as prejudicial and unnecessarily limiting for some types of felons who were no longer a danger to society.

Other legislation that the Board did not give priority to included:

**HB 2397** (Dickerson) creating a pilot project to deliver *mental health services to children.* This is a pilot that would be used to broadly improve “evidence-based” mental health services to children and adolescents. UW Dept. of Psychiatry will collaborate with selected programs submitted by community agencies and providers. It **died in the House Appropriations committee**, a real disappointment.

**HB 2399** (Cody): creating a *health survey for health care providers which could identify how many of the 16,000 Registered “Counselors”* (no training required) actually do have training. This is part of a plan to require all mental health professionals to be licensed. **Survey limited to Licensed Health Care Providers. A survey for Registered Counselors will be developed during interim.**

**SB 6232** (Keiser) – would *require insurers to report information* on how long waits are for receiving services, how many providers are not taking new patients, and how many providers are no longer taking patients but are kept on insurance rolls to appear to have a larger network. It **died in the House Rules committee.** This was a serious disappointment as well, but the insurers strongly opposed providing what they regard as proprietary information according to Laura.

Two bills which are not specific to mental health but which reflect the values on which mental health treatment is based and what the Coalition stands for, passed this session. These bills are a victory for all citizens of Washington.

**HB 2661** – Prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. Signed into law by Governor in January, 2006. Partial wording of law as follows:

**“RCW 49.60.010** This chapter shall be known as the “law against discrimination”. It is an exercise of the police power of the state for the protection of the public welfare, health, and peace of the people of this state, and in fulfillment of the provisions of the Constitution of this state concerning civil

rights. The legislature hereby finds and declares that practices of discrimination against any of its inhabitants because of race, creed, color, national origin, families with children, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, age, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a disabled person are a matter of state concern, that such discrimination threatens not only the rights and proper privileges of its inhabitants but menaces the institutions and foundation of a free democratic state.”

**SB 6194** – Requires all health professionals to be trained in working with diverse cultural populations. Currently on the Governor’s desk. Partial wording of the bill as follows:

“The legislature finds that women and people of color experience significant disparities from the general population in education, employment, healthy living conditions, access to health care, and other social determinants of health. The legislature finds that it shall be a priority for the state to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and practice skills of health professionals and those working with diverse populations to achieve a greater understanding of the relationship between culture and health and gender and health. By July 1, 2008, each education program with a curriculum to train health professionals for employment in a profession credentialed by a disciplining authority under chapter 18.130 RCW shall integrate into the curriculum instruction in multicultural health as part of its basic education preparation curriculum. The department may not deny the application of any applicant for a credential to practice a health profession on the basis that the education or training program that the applicant successfully completed did not include integrated multicultural health curriculum as part of its basic instruction.”

Laura reflected that “overall, there was progress, but not as much as I would have liked in terms of getting mental health services to the vulnerable populations who have limited access to them, i.e., children and the poor. I will be working on improving access between now and the 2007 Legislative Session.”

### **Meet Your Board Member: Susan Cohen**

**Position on the Board:** Membership Chair. I’m going on my 3rd year as a member of the Coalition since its inception, I have always wanted to become more involved. As a single working Mom, however, my time was limited. When my daughter became more independent, I had time to become more involved.

**Current Home Town:** Kenmore **Original Home Town:** Steeler territory. Pittsburgh

**Work:** I’m in private practice on Lake Bellevue in Bellevue **Education:** MSW; Washington University; George Warren Brown School of Social Work 1979; Licensed in both Social work and Marriage and Family therapy;

**What do you do for fun ?** Spend time with my 17 year young daughter -when she will allow the time spent with Mom rather than her friends! I go to Greenlake everyday; play with my dogs..; travel frequently to spend time on Whidbey.....and spend time with my fiance!

**Guilty Pleasures:** malted milk balls! **Anything else you would like to share ?**I consider it a true honor to be a Coalition Board member; an honor to be part of a team that does such necessary and quality work for the good of so many people.....it's an honor!

The Coalition of Mental Health  
Professionals and Consumers  
PO Box 30087  
Seattle, WA 98103

**Join or Renew Your Commitment to Protect Mental Health Care**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Member: \$65

Student: \$15

Consumer: Free

Organization: \$124

Willing to help with specific tasks: YES \_\_\_\_\_

OK to publish information in a directory ? YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

